



Remembering Brown vs. Board of Education

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights is commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education by hosting a public forum on Monday, May 24, 2004, at 6:30 PM, at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. The museum is located at 315 Warren Street, Detroit, Michigan 48201.

The Forum is titled, "Fifty Years After Brown v. Board of Education: The Harms and Concerns of Continued Segregation in Michigan." The forum will consider that as we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, Michigan is one of the most residentially and educationally segregated states in the country, with the Detroit area being the most segregated metropolitan area in America.

Detroit Judge Donna Robinson Milhouse composed the set forth below poem regarding the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education decision.

Landmark

By Judge Donna Robinson Milhouse

An important Supreme Court case that helped heal our nation
Was the landmark decision of Brown versus Board of Education.
In order to value its true significance
Lets review what came before, and what it meant.
Even books that chronicle our past now concede
That the United States has a troubled history.
Grown out of a quest for new lands that were conquered and denied
From the Native Americans who already occupied.
And then separate colonies began to be formed
And a growing desire for independence was born.
The disputes from Europe to this great land were brought
And the cause of freedom from monarch rule was fought.
When the colonists won there was much jubilation
And true independence from Britain was the resounding declaration.
"All men are created equal," Declaration of Independence said
But when it came to race, there was inequality instead.
The enslavement of Blacks was the law of the land
And the constitution was used to support that stand.
The Supreme Court even held Blacks were mere property

Judge Milhouse



And that Dred Scott, a Black man, could not sue to be free.
Image the humanity.
The court said Dred Scott was not a U.S. citizen
And that therefore, freedom was not his to win.
You know it must have been hard to swallow that pill
For Black folks who were brought here against their will.
Even after the Civil War ended and Blacks were so-called free
There was still a constant struggle for true dignity.
So that the Constitution could not be used again to flip the script
The 14th Amendment afforded Blacks full citizenship.
It said that citizens were people born or naturalized here
And that equal protection of the laws would be the law through the years.
But lo' and behold Blacks were still mistreated
Like second class citizens, the aim of equality was not heeded.
Then the case of Plessey versus Ferguson added more insult to the fray
The court said separate is equal; segregation is O.K.
Blacks and Whites, the law said, could not sit together
And race relations in this country seemed doomed forever.
These United States had all these laws of separation
Curious for a place that was formed as one nation.
But the curious happens when hearts sink in a sea of discrimination.
Couldn't drink from the same fountains
Couldn't eat at the same places
Couldn't stand up and be counted
Whole identity negated.
Couldn't attend the same schools
Couldn't play by the same rules
Land of opportunity?
Who were they trying to fool?
When many acts of oppression were unbelievably cruel.
These prohibitions we came to know
As the laws of Jim Crow
Sanctioned by the courts as constitutional.
But there were forces at work for a different interpretation
Of these laws of division that were dividing our nation
Especially when it came to our children and their education
There was purpose and commitment and steadfast determination.
So, in several school districts across the country where the sting of segregation was felt
Legal giants took giant steps to challenge the hand of injustice that was dealt.
Those lawsuits were litigated through the lower courts before
They were finally consolidated at the Supreme Courthouse door
And the court issued that landmark decision in 1954.
The NAACP
Worked tirelessly
With Thurgood Marshall, Oliver Hill and Constance Baker Motley
Charles Hamilton Houston masterminding the legal strategy

And others who made a compelling case for true equality
So compelling, that the Supreme Court overturned the decision in Plessey.
In these cases, known together as Brown versus Board of Education,
The U.S. Supreme Court made this profound proclamation
That separate is not equal on its face
And that therefore, states can't segregate by race
It took the Supreme Court some time to issue its opinion
But issue it did, it was a unanimous decision
Chief Justice Warren wrote on behalf of the court
That the 14th Amendment could no longer be used to support
The indignity this country had come to endorse
So 50 years later we must stay the course
To make sure that the long hard road that was traveled
That made sure all children had a chance to succeed
Is not forgotten, and the fabric of justice unraveled
That we embrace each opportunity,
As we pursue paths of freedom and peace on which to embark
The Brown decision lights the way and is right at the heart
Of knowing that "just us" is injustice, we all play a part
That's why we can celebrate Brown as a true landmark.

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Judge Donna Robinson Milhouse serves on the 36th District Court in Detroit, Michigan.

For more information on Brown vs. Board of Education:

Brown vs. Board of Education: The Interactive Experience

<http://www.digisys.net/users/hootie/brown/>

In Pursuit of Freedom and Equality: Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka

<http://brownvboard.org/>

University of Michigan Brown vs. Board of Education Digital Archive

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/exhibits/brownarchive/>

Brown vs. Board 50 Years Later: Opposition to School Integration Spread North

<http://www.blackamericaweb.com/site.aspx/bawnews/north512>